Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/011013/larsonSM.png**Former Cedarburg resident and accomplished explorer makes agonizing decision to scrap groundbreaking Antarctic mission**

Polar explorer Eric Larsen, who hoped to be the first person to bicycle to the South Pole, was forced to abort his 750-mile Cycle South quest when his progress was slower than he expected.

On Dec. 28, day 10 of what he expected to be a four-week solo journey, Larsen decided to turn around and bike back to his base camp near Hercules Inlet, where on Dec. 20 he set off on a specially designed Surly Moonlander bike with five-inch wide tires to reach the South Pole.

He had expected to cover 25 to 40 nautical miles a day, but it was much tougher riding in the soft, drifting snow than he expected.

“I realized that due to an increased amount of climbing, headwinds, and consequently sastrugi and drifts, my daily mileage would realistically be closer to 10 nautical miles per day,” Larsen said in a post on his website.

“At that rate, my chances of making the pole before my food ran out (as well as the end of the season) would be zero — odds that would basically mean a costly extraction somewhere before the pole.

“Now, I’ve taken a lot of chances in all kinds of shapes and forms, but this was not a chance I was willing to take. I cried in my tent for a long time when I finally decided.”

Larsen said he made one last attempt to bike south before crashing in the soft snow.

“I yelled and screamed and punched my fist in the snow,” he wrote. “I was exasperated. Then, I got up and looked around. The wind had picked up substantially, but all around there was just snow. Just like always. Antarctica. I laughed to myself.

“This was not the first time that this icy place has turned back an expedition.”

After a few minutes, he turned his back to the wind and started the long ride back to Hercules Inlet. After an hour, he got a flat tire and had to set up his tent to change it.

Larsen, who grew up in Cedarburg and lives in Boulder, Colo., is the son of Judy and Andrew Larsen, director emeritus of Riveredge Nature Center in the Town of Saukville who has Parkinson’s disease.

The explorer worried that he had disappointed his sponsors and his father because he was raising money for the Davis Phinney Foundation, which conducts research to help people with Parkinson’s disease.

He had urged followers to donate to the foundation and nonprofit groups that provide bicycles worldwide to those in need and promote bike travel and silent snow sports.

Larsen’s mother said she and her husband talked to their son via satellite phone before he made his decision.

“He was thinking the wise thing would be to stop, and he doesn’t like doing the wise thing. He said, ‘How are you going to feel about the decision if I decide to go back?’” she said.

“I told him, ‘We’ll agree with whatever decision you have to make.’ The whole journey was 750 miles, and he had gone about 150 miles and was supposed to be at about 350 miles.

“The weather was a killer and he was having problems with his body. He made a good decision.”

In his posts, Larsen did not question his decision but kept his focus on returning to the base camp at Union Glacier, where he could be picked up. When he got there on Jan. 5, he had to wait several days for the weather to clear so a Twin Otter aircraft could pick him up.

On Monday, he went to the Punta Arenas Airport in Chile. He expected to be Colorado Wednesday afternoon.

He was eager to get back to Boulder, his partner Maria Hennessey and their 2-month-old son Merritt.

Larsen spent four of the last five Christmases in Antarctica. In 2010, he completed his Save the Poles quest to reach the North Pole, South Pole and summit of Mount Everest within 365

days. But he was with teams on his other quests.

Being alone and seeing only snow most days required him to focus on his mission.

“The mental strain of thinking about family and friends only compounds a sense of loneliness,” he wrote.

“I’ve always felt that the way to determine what is important in your life is by simply (well maybe not so simply) removing everything.

“Maria and Merritt are obviously important, but I have to work to keep their memory sharp. It can be hard to feel distant from friends and family but it is also a necessity.

“The amount of physical and mental energy that is required to be out here every day is substantial. And it’s not like the effort ends as soon as I decide to camp. It takes me nearly an hour after pulling up to a hospitable piece of snow before I can climb in the tent.”

In other posts, he talked about the beauty of Antarctica, the cold and once being so warm he bicycled in a short-sleeved shirt.

To learn more about Larsen’s adventure, visit www.ericlarsenexplore.com.

Image Information: HIS MOONLANDER BICYCLE loaded with supplies, Eric Larsen rode across the snow-covered landscape of Antarctica in his aborted quest to reach the South Pole. In the above photo, he ate soup in his warm tent. The soup was heated by solar power.
Photos by Eric Larsen